

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
ISSN-2321-7065

IJELLH

International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed), UGC Approved Journal



Volume 7, Issue 2, February 2019

www.ijellh.com

Vinoy Joseph

Assistant Professor of History,

KMM Govt Women's College,

Kannur, Kerala, India

vinchrish@gmail.com

Urnite Hillocks in Wayanad

Terms: Urnite, Hillocks, Kodakkal, Toppikkal.

Study of Megaliths in India often attracted scholars within India and abroad alike for about three centuries since the presentation of Babington at Bombay in 1823.¹ As rightly observed by Wheeler 'South India is a land of temples but even the temples are outnumbered by these ancient tombs', one can find the Megalithic tombs and burials spread out in peninsular region abundantly. The region of Kerala, provided monuments of varied types including Kodakkal (umbrella stone) and Toppikal (Hat stone) concentrating in the midlands. Typologically, all the eight types of sepulchral burials mentioned by Subbarayalu², find space across the mainland of Kerala. Though these structures are found distributed across the region unevenly, they must be following a specific route or path of distribution about which the scholars have different hypotheses.

Wayanad at a glance:

The mainland of Wayanad provided asylum to a number of original tribes, hill residents, primitive dwellers, migrants and nomads as well. Though there are different traditions and

1 J. Babington, "Description of the Pandoo Coolies in Malabar," Transactions of the Literary Society of Bombay, Vol.111, 1823, pp.324-330.

² Noboru Karashima (ed), A Concise History of South India, Oxford University Press, pp 16-18

views regarding the origin of the term 'Wayanad', there are references about this region in some of the literary sources and inscriptions. Historians hold that the reference about the region called, Kurumporai' is perhaps pertaining to Wayanad. Some believe that the reference given by Udhandha Shastrikal in Kokilasandesha, a 13th century work, about the Vishnu temple, is Thirunelli in Wayanad. The author asks the Kokila/bird to pay visit to all the 'Shiva' temples and while crossing the ghats, she is instructed to pay homage to Vishnu by partially tilting its wings to the direction of the temple at Thirunelli. More than that, the term itself, as held some writers, is referred in Kittoor Ravivarmmeshwara Temple Inscription.³ Whatever may be the tradition and hypotheses about the origin of the term and its genesis, it's clear that the region found an important place in the pre historic map of the peninsula. Wayanad as seen today was designed as a district in 1980, November 1 amalgamating the north and south Wayanad which were parts of Kannur and Kozhikode district respectively. The population of Wayanad consists of farmers, plantation workers, agricultural labourers and those who earn their livelihood from forest produces and animal husbandry. The district has the highest tribal population with 1.25 lakh tribal people residing. (17% of the total population).⁴

The region of Wayanad, arrayed in sepulchral monuments supposed to be belonging to the Iron Age seem to be a continuation of the widespread burial culture monuments found in Andhra region Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. This must be due to the table land properties of the Plateau ending up in Wayanad. Geographically the location of Wayanad is adjoining to the windward side of Western Ghats receiving abundance of rainfall with a typical temperate zone climate as felt in 2018-19 winter season hitting 10⁰c⁵ which was 7-8⁰ in 1991-94, as the report further says.⁶ The climate, geography and its location must have contributed in evolving a distinctive hill culture in the prehistoric times. The distribution, rock paintings in Edakkal

³ Gopi Mundakkayam, *Kurumpurai*, Sahya Publications, 2014, p. 277

⁴ Retrieved from http://cgwb.gov.in/District_Profile/Kerala/Wayanad.pdf

⁵ <https://english.mathrubhumi.com/kerala-1.3448370>

⁶ Ibid.

Caves, and the widespread remains of Jain temples and other temples bear testimony to the continuous human intervention in the area down through historic periods. However, saving a few salvage excavations and two Megalithic excavations, no serious studies were made on this region with regard to prehistory. In case of megalithic monuments of Wayanad, a detailed study would be possible only through the typological analysis with a well-planned expedition supported by sophisticated interdisciplinary tools. Disciplines like Archaeology, Geography, Anthropology, Geology, and Meteorology could be of greater assistance in comprehending the vital features of these remains. However, such an attempt would be impossible without accessibility to a database of remains in a given area. Human geography with its present trend would soon create a deformed geography and land form pattern before such a study could be initiated.

Context of Enquiry:

This paper is trying to unveil a small aspect of the study of Megaliths in Wayanad region, treating it as a different geographical unit. It is an attempt to point out the major Urn burial sites of Wayanad, trying to trace out if there existed a specific path for the planting of Megalithic urns creating urnite hillocks. To simplify it, it is an attempt to see if there are any connections between these urnite hillocks and the trade routes ending up on the western coast. It is done with a general presupposition that the burial sites found in the given region falls on the prehistoric routes overlooking the river systems. However this presupposition is also supplemented with ample evidence of landscape archaeology which needs further research. Still certain signboards towards such a study is dropped in here.

Overview of Literature:

In the mainland of Kerala, excavations were conducted at Cranganore (1969-70) Pazhayannur and Machad (1974), Cheramanparambu (1972-73), Mangad (1991), Porkkalam (1983-86), Umichippoyil (2002) brought out fresh insights regarding the typology, alignment and the nature of deposits. All these excavations were named after the site excavated and conclusions were on the basis of a site or a cluster which presented with explicit evidences about human behavior. Explorations for Megalithic burials were done by Cammide, Dr Rajan Gurukkal and Dr Raghava Varier. Among them, it was L A Cammide who presented a report on salvage excavations conducted at Sulthan Bathery, Varadoor, Kaniyambetta and Kandathuvayal. He gave a detailed description of the same in *Man*, under the title, 'Urn-Burials in the Wayanad, Southern India' in 1930. Dr Plenderleith puts the pottery from Wayanad in the same category of Greek vases⁷ after detailed examination. The report of Cammide was reproduced in his monumental work 'The Megalithic Culture of South India'⁸ by Guru Raja Rao specifically concentrating on the presence of Urns in Wayanad. In 1987, a team of scholars led by Y Subbarayalu, excavated a cist complex at the foothills of Edakkal hills. However, the report was not published. Similarly, there was an excavation conducted by State archaeology department of Kerala in 2009 at Valal in Kottathara Panchayath, bringing to light a number of curios like mud balls. But the post excavation works were never followed and the report is yet to be published. Among the sites mentioned above, except for Valal, and Kuppakkolli, other sites remain unidentified. However there are discoveries of urns and jars of lesser dimensions from nearby places to supplement the list of Cammide.

Terminology:

⁷ Plenderleith, "Black Polished Pottery from Urn-Burials in the Wayanad" *Man*, vol.3, 1930

⁸ B K Guru Raja Rao, *The Megalithic Culture of South India*, Prasaranaga, university of Mysore, 1972, p-60-61.

The term 'Urns' is generally used as a generic term to denote the massive earthen jar which is often associated with the burial system which is argued to have existed during the Iron Age, throughout the world. Though urns differ in size, stature, composition, colour and the goods deposited in them, the term is now widely used to denote the pottery items recovered from any burial place with stone appendage. In midland of Kerala, these urns are mainly found beneath the stone slabs laid on the surface either as in a cist or Kudakkal/Toppikkal (Umbrella stones/Hat stones). There was the occurrence of three or four legged urns (Valal) along with un-sculptured and pyriform urns (Kandathuvayal). There was also a combination of thick and thin Black and Red Ware and thin polished red ware (Bathery).⁹ According to Cammide, there was point based, round based urns from Sulthan Bathery, while at Kaniyambetta and Kandathuvayal there were, point based pyriform type, rotund urn with more or less flattened base and cylindrical urns with flat bottom. In 2013, there was the discovery of more urns from Ellumandham near Mananthavady.

Urnite Hillocks:

According to Cammide, there are four sites yielding urns of different dimensions. Apart from these sites there are a number of other individual sites yielding urns of smaller and equal measurements were found the same belt subsequently. Setting aside the individual appearances, the discovery of 'urnite hillocks' from Valal and Ellumannam and urnite filed from Kottathra can be added to the list given by Cammide. These urnite hillocks invoke the curiosity of scholars as they share some common features. They are listed below the details of the sites found recently from Wayanad. The Iron Age remains in Wayanad seem to be not belonging to a particular phase of human migration. Instead they seem to represent the different stages of

⁹ L A Cammide, *Urn-Burials in the Wynaad, Southern India*, Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, p-183-86, retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2790464>.

human migration, to go by the general notion that they had no settlements. Archaeologists like R B Foote denied the possibility of human settlements in the extreme cold heights of Western Ghats. However the unveiling of the cists in Chembra hills, (at a height of 4500 msl) ruled it out clearly. The remains found from a cist in 1970's at Chembra hills yielded a number of artifacts including the figurines of buffaloes made in bronze. It essentially points out the possibility of human presence at such a height during the transitional phase or later period. The inhabitants (if they were!) must have avoided the low valley due to geographical perils like mosquitoes or marshy lands generating diseases. We have a similar cist found in Kurichyar Mala near Achooranam which provided terracotta human figurines of man and woman which had protruding teeth mentioning the presence of flesh eating humans. However there are less or no examples of urns straightaway buried at such heights. Instead we have examples of urn deposits on the slanting sides of the lower hillocks as mentioned above. Following sites of the existing Urnite hillocks can be added to the list provided by Cammide;

1. Valal:

a) Geo-coordinates	11° 39' 58.716" N 76° 0' 40.2264" E
b) Location	Valal, in Kottathara Panchayath
c) Altitude/sea level	749/2457 ft
d) Landscape features	Hillock of rubber plantation and other cash crops.
e) Type of remains	Urns of varied sizes and different types.
f) Date of discovery	2012

2. Ellumantham :

a) Geo-coordinates	11° 47' 12.3" N 75° 57' 44.244" E
b) Location	Ellumannam, Edavaka Panchayath
c) Altitude/sea level	754/2473 ft

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| d) Landscape feature | Slanting Hillock perhaps used as Urn burial ground |
| e) Type of remains | Massive urns of different size and types. |
| f) Year of discovery | 2013 |

Near Kurumbalakotta, not away from Panamaram River, while constructing a road in 1980's workers found around forty urns arranged in double rows. Digging deeper two feet more they came across another row of smaller pots arranged in a line. Continuity of habitation is clearly mentioned in the area even today with a very old temple and Kavu. Examining the location and layout of these urn hills we may reach the following conclusions:

- a) Majority of urns excavated and accidentally found are located on hillsides.
- b) Most of them share common features like round base, pyriform, point bottomed and globular bodied.
- c) These sites seem to follow a specific riparian route going towards the windward side of the Western Ghats and reaching the natural seaports on the western coast of north Kerala.
- d) It was in 2016 January, a salvage digging was conducted at Kinalur in Panangad village of Kozhikode district by Department of History, Arts College Calicut, supervised by a team led by Selvakumar, which brought to surface a few urns, iron slags, microliths and beads of various types. Recently, in October 2017, a globular type urn was recovered from Panthalayani Kollam, which is hailed as an ancient port of Malabar Coast, in Kozhikode district.

These places are located on the rivers that emerge from the Western Ghats opposite to those river sources along which the urnite hillocks in Wayanad are found.

- e) Similarly, there was discovery of Urns from another hillock near Naduvil in Kannur district which also falls on the riverine route leading to the Valapattanam River, to join Arabian Sea.
- f) Most of the west flowing rivers of North Malabar emanates as small estuaries from the western side of the Western Ghats forming large rivers like Irittipuzha, Anjarakkandippuzha,

Thalasseriappuzha, Kuttyadippuzha and Korappuzha. Along the banks of these rivers, rock cut chambers on soft laterite bedrocks were reported by scholars like M D Raghavan.

The multitude of discoveries reported, prompt us to look upon the burial monuments of Wayanad region not as a separate entity; but as a mega- cultural structure with lots of bifurcations and combinations which should be seen from a multidimensional perspective. However, this does not mean that the so called multi-dimensional approach is complete in itself; instead it is a pointer towards the problematizing of themes related to the character and nature of Megalithic Culture, combining the geographical, geological, anthropological and toponymical aspects of the subject matter.

For example, Logan speaks about the Malabar in nineteenth century where he mentions the hinterland-foreland routes of the region up to Mysuru. “Though Valarpattanam River is smaller in length than many other rivers of Malabar, largest volume of water is flowed to the ocean through this river. It has three tributaries. One of them joins the river at the spot where spring tide occurs. Through this contributory, small boats can go up to Wayanad hill pass.”¹⁰ To supplement this the words of Gordon Child can be taken into consideration. According to him, ‘if the Indian Megaliths had their origin in the west, the contacts must have been through sea.’¹¹

However it is not possible to reach any concrete assumptions regarding the nature of Urn burials of Wayanad region, with limited excavated evidences and scanty database. Yet from the distribution of the urnite hills and urn-fields examined in Wayanad and in Kannur district of North Kerala, it is possible to assert that there would have been a vital route of primitive exchange of agro-pastoral economic life. The period must have marked a transition from the primitive food gathering or hunting social life to an agrarian based life in the Iron

¹⁰ Logan, Malabar Province, (rpt.) Mathrubhoomi Books, 2008, 31.

¹¹ Gordon Child, Megaliths, Ancient India, No 4, New Delhi, 1948, pp-5-13, cited in Bibliography of Indian Megaliths by B K Thapar. p-36

Age. The change in the climate and increase in population must have prompted them to spread southward and eastwards that we find similar Cist burials and dolmens in Anamala and Nilgiris. Accounts of other reports of William Noble and Rosner¹² are also taken in to consideration, to get a broader view of the picture.¹³ The remains from the stone assemblage and urn burials do not agree with a parallel formation of the burials. Instead they denote the inhabitation of human beings at different layers of historical periods.

Major issues related to the Iron Age of Kerala are pertaining to the remains in Wayanad and elsewhere too. Antiquity, authorship, structural features, orientation, alignment and similar issues are often debated upon widely. Interdisciplinary approaches would definitely give the studies in this regard an extra mileage. Geographically speaking, one can find a relation in the distribution of the burials all over the area right from the foothills of Brahmagiri to Nilgiris. Diwindled to the seaward side of the Western Ghats we find urnite hillocks with no cases of granite cists, dolmens or cairns. As noted earlier, in 1930 itself Plenderlieth had concluded that the vessels excavated were more or less similar to those Greek Vessels recovered by Alexander Brongniart.¹⁴ Therefore it's possible to think that the megalithic people who were the authors of the urns found, were related to seafaring traders following some kind of exchanges. This exchanges must have been unequal that we find less of foreign goods like that of Brecks discovery in Nilgiris.¹⁵ The possible items if exchange must have been spices like pepper, cardamom, cinnamon, honey, ivory, and plants of medicinal power. Studies in this direction may bring better insights into the themes in future.

¹² Notes: Victor Rosner studied the characteristic features of Dolmens in Anamalai Hills, published in *Anthropos*. He meticulously studied and described the dolmens found in the Anamalai Hills including Marayur

¹³ William A Noble, Nilgiri Dolmens (South India), *Anthropos*, Bd.71,H.1./2.(1976), p-90

¹⁴ H J Plenderleith, Black Polished pottery from Urn burials in Wayanad, *Man*, vol.3, 1930

¹⁵ J W Brecks, An account of the Primitive Tribes and Monuments of the Nilgiris, London, 1987, cited by B K Thapar. P-33

References

- Allchin B, Allchin R. *The Birth of Indian Civilization*. London, 1983.
- Ayyappan, A. "Primitive Handmade Pottery." *Quarterly Journal of Mythic Society, Bangalore* (1934): 299-314.
- . "Rock Cut Cave Tombs of Feroke, South Malabar." *Man* (1923).
- B, Narasimaih. "Exploration in District North Arcot and Salem." *IA* (1964-65): 22.
- B.K, Thapar. "Porkalam, 1948-Excavation of a Megalithic Urn Burial." *AI-No.8* (1952): 3-8.
- Brecks, J W. "An Account of The Primitive Tribes and Monuments of Nilgiris." London (1987).
- . *An Account of the Primitive Tribes and Monuments of the Nilgiris*. London, 1987.
- Caldwell, R. "Sepulchral Urns in Southern India." *Indian Antiquity* (1887): 81-83.
- Chakrabarti, Dilip K. "The Development of Archaeology in the Indian Subcontinent." *World Archaeology* (1982): 326-344. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/124387>>.
- Champalakshmi, R. *Trade Ideology and Urbanization; South India 300 BC to AD 300*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Child, V Gordon. "Megaliths." *Ancient India, Bulletin of the Archaeological Survey of India* (1948): 5-13.
- Codrington, K. De B. "Indian Cairn- and Urn-Burials." *Man* (1930): 190-196.
- <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2790468>>.
- Department of Archaeology, Kerala State. "Megalithic Sites Kanimangalam, District Trichur." *Indian Archaeology-A Review* (1967-68): 66.
- . "Rock Cut Caves in District Kozhikode." *Indian Archaeology-A Review* (1959-60): 68.

Director, Department of Archaeology, Kerala. "Megaliths, Districts Kozhikode, Megaliths

Districts Quilon and Palghat and Rock Cut Caves District Trichur." Indian

Archaeology-A Review (1961-62): 58-59.

Elliot, W. "On The Sepulchral Remains of Southern India." Report of the British Association

for Advancement of Sciences- Transactions (1886): 134-35.

Fawcett, F. Notes on the Rock Carvings in the Edakkal Cave Wayanad. Sulthan Bathery:

Shreyas Publications, 2006.

—. "Rock Cut Sepulchral Chambers in Malabar." Journal Of the Archaeological

Institute, London (1896): 371-73.

—. "South Indian Stone Circles." Journal of the Anthropological Institute, London

(1896): 373-74.

Fergusson, James. Rude Stone Monuments in All Countries, Age and Uses. London, 1872.

Foote, R.B. Government Museum Madras; Catalogue of the Pre historic Antiquities. Madras, 1901.

—. The Foote Collection of Indian Pre historic Antiquities- Notes on Ages and Distribution. 1916.

Ganesh, K N. Keralathinte Innalekal. Thruvanathapuram: Kerala Bhasha Institute, 1990.

Gururaj Rao, B.K. Megalithic Culture of South India. Mysore: Prasara, University of Mysore, 1972.

Hunt E, H. "Megalithic Burials in South India." JRS (1933): 508-10.

Iyer, Krishna, L.A. "The Significance of Megalithic Monuments." QJMA XXIX (1938-39): 58-61.

J, Babyington. "Description of the Pandoo Coolies in Malabar." Transactions of Literary Society of Bombay (1823): 324-330.

K M George Ed. The Malayali. New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 2002.

- K, Chandrashekharan. "Exploration in District Quilon and Trivandrum." *Indian Archaeology-A Review* (1961-62): 21.
- . "Exploration in District Trichur." *Indian Archaeology -A Review* (1967-68): 23.
- . "Megalithic Sites, District Cannanore and Rock Cut Caves, District Cannanore and Kozhikode." *Indian Archaeology-A Review* (1960-61): 58.
- K.S, Ramachandran. "Bridle bits from Indian Megaliths." *QJMS* (n.d.).
- Kapp, Dieter B. "The Kurumbas' Relationship to the "Megalithic Cult of the Nilgiri Hills (South India)." *Anthropos* (1985): 493-534.
- Krishna Iyyer, L A. "Pre Historic Archaeology in Kerala." *Quarterly Journal of Mythic Society* XX (1929-30): 115-126.
- Krishnaswamy, V D. *MEGALITHIC TYPES OF SOUTH: INDIA*. 13 March 2017 .
<<http://www.southasiaarchive.com/Content/sarf.120094/208658/006>>.
- . "Meglithic Types of South India." *AI* (1949): 35-45.
- . "Prehistoric Cochin." *Proceedings of Indian Science Congress Association* (1947): 142.
- L, Myers J. (n.d.).
- L.A, Cammide. "Urn Burials in The Wayanad,Southern India." *Man* (1930).
- Lewis, A L. "Notes on the Builders and the Purpose of Megalithic Monuments." *RBAST* (1869): 137.
- liam . "Religions of Malabar." (1887): 179-183.
- Logan, William. "Find of Ancient Pottery in Malabar." *In.Ant. VIII* (1879): 309-311.
- . *Malabar Province* (rpt). Calicut: Mathrubhoomi Books, 2008.
- . "Rock Cut Caves of Calicut." *ARSI* (1911-12): 59-60.
- M, Sheshadri. "Megaliths in Mysore." *IA* (1955-56): 70.
- . "The stone using cultures of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Mysore." (1950): 59-72.

M. R. Raghava Varier, (et all). KUPPAKKOLLI MEGALITH (1987) EXCAVATION SITE

NOTEBOOK. Calicut: Unpublished, 1987.

M.D, Raghavan. "South Indian Neolithic Culture." SI (1932): 63-66.

—. "The Gourd form in Pottery." Man XXXV (1935).

—. "The Rock Cut Caves of Malabar." Dr Krishnaswamy Aiyangar Commemorial Volume
(n.d.).

M.J, Wallhouse. "Archaeological Notes- Holed Dolmens." Ind.Ant.III (1874): 277-78.

—. "Archaeological Reminiscences." Ind.Ant. III (1874): 33-36.

—. "On some formerly existing antiquities of Nilgiris." Ind.Ant. (1873): 275-78.

Mackenzie, J S F. "On the Rude Stone ARchaeology of the Hasan District Maisur." Ind. Ant.
(1873): 7-10.

Menon, Govinda, K. "Red Painted Pottery from Cochin State." Man (1937).

Noble, William A. "Nilgiri Dolmens (South India)." Anthropos (1976): 90-128.

<<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41219383>>.

Plendeleith, H J. "Black Polished Pottery from Urn Burials in Wayanad." Man XXX (1930):
138.

R N Mehtha and K M George. "Megaliths at Machad and Pazhayannur." 1978.

R, Srinivasan K. "Survey of South Indian Megaliths." AI (1953): 103-115.

Ramavarma. "Sepulchral Urns in the District Coimbatore." Ind.Ant. VII (1887): 26-27.

Rao Gururaja, B.K. "Megalithic sites in District of Chitradurga." IA (1959-60): 73.

Rao, Gururaja, B.K. "Urn Burials in District Madurai." IA (1958-59): 71.

—. "Urn Burials nad Historical site in District South Arcot." IA (1958-59): 71.

Ray, Himanshu P. "The Yavana Presence in Ancient India." Journal of the Economic and
Social History of the Orient, Vol. 31, No. 3 (1988): 311-325.

Rea, Alexander. "Adichanallur Excavation." ARASMC (1902-03): 11-14.

—. Exacavation of Pre Historic Caves- Perunganam. New Delhi: ASI, 1922.

—. "Some Burial Places in Southern India." JASB LVII (1888): 48-71.

Reddy, Ramakrishna A. "Bowls from Ur and Nilgiris ." Man XXXI (1931).

Robert, Sewell. "Prehistoric Burial sites in Southern India." JRAS (1902): 165-170.

Rosner, Victor. "Dolmens in the Anamalai Hills, South India." Anthropos, Bd. 54, H. 1./2.

(1959): 169-182.

Sankalia, H D. "Sir Mortimer Wheeler, 1890-1976." American Anthropologist, New Series,

Vol. 79, No. 4 (1977): 894-895. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/673283>>.

Sarkar, S.S. "Skeletal Remains from Brahmagiri." BDA IX (1960): 5-26.